

**Protect Parks and Parkland That Could Be Sold by County Executive**

Milwaukee County residents place a high value on their parks and public access. Our park system is a legacy that we must protect for future generations.

That is why the County Board is acting to guard our “emerald necklace” from sale by the County Executive. Our parks are too important to be left to the whims of an Executive who does not value them.

A resolution I have introduced supports the protection of Milwaukee County parks and parkland. The legislation opposes the sale of any parks lacking the designated zoning as parkland, and requests the Parks Department and Corporation Counsel to seek immediate parkland rezoning of identified park properties to protect them from sale.

There is good reason for concern among those who love our parks. Dozens of parks properties could be sold or leased today by the County Executive without legislative oversight or a public hearing due to legislation (Act 55) he sought in Madison just before he sold Park East land for \$1 to the Milwaukee Bucks.

A review of park properties was initiated at the request of the County Board in November, not on the initiative of the Administration.

Citizens are generally unaware of this situation, but it appears 43 parks properties could be sold without a public hearing or legislative oversight -- today.

People will be shocked when they see the list of 43 properties that could be sold, which includes Lake Park, Bay View Park, Red Arrow Park, Whitnall Park, Cathedral Square and Runway Dog Park. So far, the feedback I have received calls into question the accuracy and completeness of the Administration’s list.

It is clear that the list itself was deliberately held back by the Parks Department from the public in an attempt to allow the Executive to claim he is working on a solution.

Unfortunately, while posing as a champion of our parks, the Executive has misled the public about the danger of his continued quest for added power. There would not be an issue today about what parks are at-risk, what parks may need rezoning or whether in fact the Executive has undisclosed plans to sell parks, if the County Executive simply had not sought a change in the law to give him additional power to sell county land. We are having this discussion as a direct result of the Executive’s actions. One isn’t a real hero if they help to save someone from a danger they initiated.

I certainly do not know if the Executive sought to protect parkland when he negotiated new authority to sell County land. In recent history, the Executive has attempted to sell a County park to a private business and lease a whole park to a separate party. Only those who were with him behind closed doors in those negotiations could possibly know what he requested from the legislature versus what was granted to him. But when a person routinely deals in the dark to amass power, it is natural for people to become increasingly suspicious.

Whatever the intent of Act 55, whether it was simply passed to allow the sale of Park East land to the Bucks or whether there are larger designs on our public assets, it is a dangerous piece of legislation that forces the legislative body and the public out of decision-making when it comes to protecting our public places. If the Executive is serious about protecting our parks, he will follow the County Board’s lead.

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